

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7804

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 15059

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VT, XF, SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI DELEGATION VISITS VATICAN

REF: ROME 14556

1. WHAT VATICAN SOURCES CONSIDER A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL 5-DAY VISIT OF SAUDI ARABIAN GREAT ULEMA DELEGATION CONCLUDED OCT 25 WITH CORDIAL PRIVATE PAPAL AUDIENCE. DELEGATION WAS HEADED BY SAUDI MINISTER OF JUSTICE SHAIKH MOHAMMED ALI AL-HARAKAN AND INCLUDED SEVERAL LEADING SAUDI ULEMA MEMBERS, MR. S.E. MCBRIDE, UN COMMISSIONER FOR NAMIBIA (RECENTLY NOMINATED FOR NOBEL PEACE PRIZE), AND NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE FOR FRENCH-ARABIC FRIENDSHIP (SIC) WHO APPARENTLY ACCOMPANYING SAUDIS THROUGHOUT THEIR EUROPEAN TOUR. ONE RELIABLE VATICAN SOURCE TOLD US THAT THESE FRENCHMEN ARE ASSOCIATED WITH POWERFUL FRENCH ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND IN ORGANIZING VISIT ARE DEFINITELY NOT UNMINDFUL OF POSSIBLE ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE TO BE GAINED BY CURRYING SAUDI ARABIAN FAVOR. ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL VATICAN ANNOUNCEMENT, GROUP IS IN EUROPE ON AN INFORMATIVE AND STUDY VISIT FOR THE "RIGHTS OF MAN". IN
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ADDITION TO DISCUSSIONS OF A RELIGIOUS NATURE WITH VATICAN SECRE-

TARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, GROUP ALSO MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE WHICH HANDLES QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND DEVELOPMENT.

2. IN HIS ADDRESS TO GROUP, WHICH GIVEN PROMINENT COVERAGE TOGETHER WITH PHOTOGRAPH ON FIRST PAGE OF VATICAN SEMI-OFFICIAL DAILY "OSSERVATORE ROMANO," POPE EXPRESSED VERY STRONG HOPE THAT THESE CONTACTS WILL HELP MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS BETTER TO KNOW AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER. POPE ALSO NOTED MAN'S GREAT NEED FOR GOD IN THIS PERIOD OF WORLDWIDE MATERIALISM. HE PRAISED SAUDIS HIGHLY IN THEIR MISSION TO FOSTER GREATER RESPECT AND TO WIDEN THE RIGHTS OF MAN. THE POPE CLOSED HIS MESSAGE WITH WARM GREETINGS TO KING FAISAL. IN REPLY, MINISTER OF JUSTICE EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE AT OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS WITH VATICAN COUNTERPARTS CONCEPT OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY. WELCOMING THE DEVELOPING DIALOGUE WITH CATHOLIC CHURCH, HE SPOKE OF EARLIER MOSLEM EFFORTS TO SPREAD MONOTHEISM IN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, NOTING THAT "DESPITE THE GENEROUS ATTITUDE OF ISLAM" THERE WAS A SERIOUS BREAKDOWN OF THE DIALOGUE IN THE 7TH CENTURY DUE TO BYZANTIUM'S FAILURE TO COOPERATE.

3. OFFICIAL OF SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS WHO ACCOMPANIED DELEGATION THROUGHOUT ROME STAY, INFORMS US THAT AT NO POINT DID QUESTION OF JERUSALEM OR HOLY PLACES ARISE. SOURCE SAID THAT AS RESULT OF THIS HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL VISIT, KING FAISAL, WHO ORIGINALLY ENCOURAGED ULEMAS TO VISIT WEST, IS HIMSELF EXPECTED TO MAKE A TRIP TO ROME WITHIN NEXT FOUR MONTHS PRIMARILY TO SEE POPE PAUL. ONE HUMOROUS TOUCH WITH A POLITICAL TWIST, ACCORDING TO MSGR. ROSSANO, SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, WAS DECISION NOT TO HEAT ROOMS IN WHICH POPE RECEIVED DELEGATION IN EFFORT TO SHOW THAT EVEN VATICAN SUFFERING FROM OIL PRICE INCREASES.

4. PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM ROME, MINISTER OF JUSTICE WAS ALSO RECEIVED BY PRESIDENT LEONE AT QUIRINALE. VOLPE

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